



Trauma-Informed Approach to Training and Education

Page 1 of 3

A Trauma-Informed Approach

A trauma-informed approach recognizes and understands the physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma on individuals. A trauma informed approach assumes that everyone has been impacted by trauma at some point in their lives and seeks to avoid further harm. It's important to keep in mind that:

- Trauma is relative and it affects everyone differently.
- Trauma is cumulative and can compound over time as additional experiences cause further traumatization.

Applying Trauma-Informed Approach in Learning Environments

When facilitating lessons or training programs that include sensitive topics, facilitators should incorporate the following elements into their psychological safety plans.

1 **Advanced information**
Inform potential learners of the topics included, names of other participants, and types of media or instructional strategies used (ex. Role-play, case studies, videos, etc.). This allows them to emotionally and/or mentally prepare for the learning experience and make informed decisions about their participation.

2 **Opt-outs**
Opt-out procedures should be advertised in advance and not require the learner to share personal details about their lived experiences or reasons for the opt out. Learners may also opt-out at any time and should be provided support.

3 **Sensitive content warnings**
Be clear on the specific topics included in the lesson, instructional strategies used, and the participation requirements. **Example:** This training session includes topics on harassment and discrimination in the workplace, including violent altercations, threats, and intimidation between coworkers. Learners are invited to voluntarily participate in discussions on presented case studies.

4 **Group guidelines**
Collaboratively establish group guidelines with the learners for their behaviour during discussions and have guidelines available throughout the lesson. Provide gentle reminders and/or directly enforce these guidelines, when needed, and act as a positive role model. Ensure confidentiality and its limits are included in guidelines so learners know how information shared in discussions will be used.

5 **Support resources**
Provide available support resources that can be accessed during or after the training session.
[CF Member Assistance Program - Canada.ca](#) - [Defence Employee Assistance Program - Canada.ca](#)

6 **Safety plan**
Establish a safety plan for how facilitators will respond to emotionally activated learners. A co-facilitator can continue the lesson while the other facilitator provides discrete support to the learner or have a designated support resource available.

7 **Trauma informed learning activities**
Avoid activities where learners are expected to share their lived experiences with sensitive topics. When role-playing, a facilitator or staff role-player should assume any emotionally activating roles, such as a victim or affected person.



Trauma-Informed Approach to Training and Education

Page 2 of 3

Support For Emotionally Activated Learners

If learners make a disclosure or are visibly distressed / emotional activated during a lesson, facilitators should check-in on their well-being and confirm their wishes for continued participation. Facilitators can call for a break or do a private check-in with the learner while their co-facilitator continues the lesson. Ask the learner if they would like to remain in the learning environment or go to another location for a more discrete conversation.

Helpful Reactions

- Ensure immediate safety and offer to connect them to support resources.
- Actively listening – allow time for them to express themselves before offering solutions.
- Admit limitations and seek additional help, when needed.
- Be honest and transparent about the assistance you can provide and any limits to confidentiality.
- Ask what they need and how you can support them.

Reactions to Avoid

- Not believe the disclosure
- Ask questions to gather details about the incident. Instead let them decide how much to share.
- Tell them what to feel or think, which can invalidate their experience.
- Try to rationalize why this happened or justify the other person's behaviour, which can reduce trust and may lead to victim-blaming.
- Impose emotions and reactions to the situation, which can take the focus off the learner who needs support.

When talking to an affected person, consider using the following trauma-informed phrases to respond to their experiences. It's important for facilitators to personalize their response to their own communication style, the situation disclosed and the needs of the affected person.

"Thank you for trusting me." or "Thank you for sharing that with me."

"I can see this is difficult for you. Take your time, I'm here to listen."

"What would help make learning this topic easier/ less distressing?"

"I can't imagine how hard it is to learn about this topic."

Following a disclosure or visibly emotional moment, consider how to re-establish group psychological safety. This could include a short grounding activity, reinforcing group guidelines, or inviting anonymous reflections to process the moment.



Trauma-Informed Approach to Training and Education

Page 3 of 3

Adapting Training and Education Based on Learner Needs

When there is mandatory training sensitive topics, modifications can be made to support individual learners. Facilitators are encouraged to discuss their needs, empower them to make informed choices about the available modifications, and be clear about the program requirements.

In addition to these modifications, ask the learner what supports they would like.

Audience

Provide training one-on-one instead of with peers in the learning environment or allow a support person to be present.



Self-Study

Provide training materials, reference policies or documents for the learner to read independently and have a follow up discussion with the facilitator.



Sensory Items

Tactile objects, such as a stress ball, fidget items with different textures or colouring pages, can be used to reduce stress or channel energy during lessons.



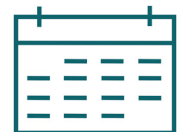
Remove non-essential activities

Limit training materials to only the necessary information and remove emotionally activating components, such as case studies or real-world examples.



Scheduling

Schedule longer or additional breaks, allow the learner to request a break at any time and consider breaking lessons into smaller portions. Ask the learner their preferred date and time for learning the topic.



Location

Provide training in a more comfortable or informal setting, such as the instructor's office or an empty classroom / meeting room, a virtual breakout room. Consider moving to another training location or building and be aware of position in the room, especially when standing near available exits.



Related resources

[Conduct and culture training and education resources - Canada.ca](#)

[Professional conduct scenarios - Canada.ca](#)

[Trauma-informed Care – 5 module course on the Defence Learning Network \(DLN\)](#)

[Trauma Informed Approach presentation – Sexual Misconduct and Resource Centre \(SMSRC\)](#)

[Respect in the CAF workshop on sexual misconduct prevention and support strategies – Health Promotions](#)